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Communities Diversify Livelihoods



The December 2004 tsunami devastated coastal communities in Thailand, wrecking families, homes, businesses, and livelihoods. Among the communities that were hardest hit were villages that relied almost entirely on income from fishing activities. The villages that proved to be more resilient and able to recover more quickly were those with diversified economies, where villagers engaged in a range of business activities.

Before the tsunami, villages that had specialized in a single area — such as fishing — enjoyed certain benefits. It was easier to promote trade and tourism in those villages. But the tsunami laid bare the danger of this approach. It became clear that a specialized economy could be a liability. USAID responded with a project to diversify economies of coastal villages, making them more resilient to shocks from environmental and economic events.

USAID is working with five village clusters of Kampuan, in southern Thailand's Ranong province that are 90 percent dependent on fisheries to help rebuild their ecosystems and diversify livelihoods, and to develop a sustainable development

A fishing family from Kampuan, Ranong province, learns about USAID's program to diversify livelihoods.

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model for other coastal villages to replicate. Under this model, villagers assess needs, identify challenges and resources, and create development action plans. Once the action plan is created, they decide where resources should be spent.

One element of the program, the revolving fund loans, helps establish small scale businesses. To be eligible for these funds, villagers sign up for training in business management and sustainable development. USAID also supports cash-for-work initiatives to rehabilitate coastal areas, support fishing stock recovery, preserve biodiversity, and stimulate tourism.

Photo: USAID/Suzanne Ross